

E. MATURE AGE

1. *The Bantu Ideal.*

581 The married man is called "he who has his home" (a ni le
 554 kwakwe) in opposition to the single man (nkhwenda). But let
 562 us say at once that the kind of individual called bachelor does
 885 not abound amongst the Bantus. Only the utterly wretched,
 invalids, and the weak-minded, are deprived of legal marriage,
 which for the black man is and remains the one object in life. It is
 through his wife and children that he becomes somebody in
 society. This fact does not appear during the first year of
 wedlock, for the newly married woman must cook at the
 fireplace of her mother-in-law. She is hardly more than a
 servant during a whole year; she does not possess her own pot;
 and this must be so because she does not yet eat the mealies of her
 own garden, having ploughed her fields in her former domicile
 595 the previous year. Her husband eats with her. He is not yet
 a lord. But if he is rich, if he is the heir of an important man,
 he will not be long in buying a second and third wife.

These new marriages will be contracted like the first, but
 with less pomp. It may even happen that the feast is held in
 the husband's village, if he is middle-aged and is celebrating his
 fifth or sixth wedding.

595 For each new wife, he will build a hut. He has begun his
 342 village when building the house of his first wife, the great wife,
 556 (nsati lwe nkulu) as she is called, who will remain the principal
 592 one whatever may happen. While, without compass, he was
 361 drawing on the ground, with the marvellous instinct of the South
 African Native, the circumference of the circle on which the
 patched reed walls of his dwelling were to rise, while he was
 covering this circular wall with a conical roof, he was saying to
 himself: "I establish my home; I inaugurate my village".
 During the following years, the aim of his life will be to complete
 little by little another wider circle... When he has bought his

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When he has brought his
second wife, he will build for her also a hut of the same type. But this second hut, the third, and the fourth which may come afterwards, will not be erected in a straight row like a street. They will form an arc, which will be prolonged so as to constitute first a semi-circle and then a complete circle, if a sufficient number of buildings are added. This is the ideal of the black man, to



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Ndjekandjeka, a headman of Spelonken, with his men.

become the lord and master of a complete circular village. Most of the men do not realise this ideal. Three or four huts, a wretched quarter of a circle is all that they attain to! Some, better armed for the struggle of life, or more favoured by circumstances, succeed in closing their circle. Their cattle, for which they have also built a circular enclosure right in the middle of the square of the village, multiply and are not carried off by peripneumonia and hematuria,

⁵⁹⁵ which, in this country, decimate so many herds! Every three
⁵⁹² years, their wives bear children. If they are boys, it is an
³⁶¹ honour; the village will not lack heirs, neither will the father
⁵⁵⁶ lack arms to help and to defend him! If they are girls, it means
⁸⁴² wealth; oxen will come to the family! Their brothers will
 not lack wives, for the sisters will be sold to provide for the
 brothers. Meanwhile, the huts are erected, large and small,
 that of the head of the family being the largest, the *malao*, those of
 the boys the least well kept.

Let us consider a Ronga favoured by fate, as was Gidja, of the
 country of Libombo, near Rikaila. His village numbered not
 less than twenty-four huts, with beautiful shady trees behind;
 notice the enclosure for the cattle and for the goats on the central
 place, that for the pigs behind the houses... There are cocks
 and hens pecking about everywhere, dogs wandering around
 in search of something to steal, for they receive hardly any food;
 a crowd of youngsters leading the cattle, and everywhere the
 noise of the pestles crushing the daily mealies in the large mortars.
 He walks about proudly in his favoured enclosure, contemplating
 his prosperity with pleasure. Young men are ready to do the
 work he gives them to do. He will treat them with beer brewed
 by his wives. And often the people of the neighbouring villages
 will join his people for dances and games on the fine square, which
 is surrounded and enclosed on all sides by huts.

⁵⁹⁵ And, above all things, in the evening, each of his wives will
⁵⁵⁶ bring him the pot which she has cooked for him. This is the
⁵⁷⁴ essential matrimonial duty of the wife. Not one will fail in it.
 Gidja, the lord of six or seven pots of mealies seasoned with a
 sauce of monkey nuts, will feast and be satiated (*shura*) every
 day, and that means much, for the inner capacity of a Thonga is
 something wonderful.

He will become large and stout, and shining, which in South
 Africa is a sure sign of wealth and nobility. The stouter he gets
 the more will he be respected. But it can easily be imagined that
 he cannot alone empty all these pots over which he reigns
 supreme. He feasts his children, but others too come to pay
 him visits at the evening hour when they know him to be surround-

556 ed by so many good things! Sycophants are not lacking, "Good
 395 evening, son of so and so!" they say. "You are one of the
 574 great men of the country." And in return for these and other
 compliments, the magnanimous Gidja shares his feast with his
 admirers!

Strangers are crossing the country and inquire where they
 can be received. "Go to Gidja" they are told. "A ni
 tshengwe, a fuya tshengwe" viz. "he is the possessor of a harem!
 He is not killed by famine! He has beer to drink every day!
 He can give food to poor people. Even then, some of it remains
 on the plate and is eaten by little boys and dogs in the square.
 There is always abundance there." And the travellers come and
 enter (khuleka) his village, after which they will tell in their homes
 the story of the magnificence of Gidja and extol his hospitality.

Thus the man who has succeeded in life becomes famous,
 his advice will carry weight in the discussions in which he takes
 part; he will perhaps be even more esteemed than the chief
 himself, though he does not enjoy the special prestige which the
 royal family owes to the blood running in its veins.

Conclusion: the greatness of an African is before all else a matter
 of pots, and the matter of pots is closely connected with polygamy!

885 During these years of mature age the evolution of a man is not
 554 marked by special ceremonies. There is one custom however
 which is common to all, and which marks an advance in their
 social position. It is that of fixing the wax ring.

II. *Fixing the wax ring.*

885 Amongst the South Africans, the crown is not the appanage of
 177 royalty. All men having reached mature age have the right to
 554 adorn themselves with it. It is true, it is not a diadem of precious
 301 stones, but a large ring of wax. This custom seems to have a
 Zulu origin. The Ba-Sutho do not know it and the Ba-Thonga,
 who all practise it, have taken it from the conquering tribe which
 owes its fortune to the famous Chaka. This habit has spread all

567 of slavery. Hundreds of them still live there and are recognisable by their very broad, coarse features. 2) The *laws of succession* 595 which regulate the present agnatic Thonga family also lead to 336 polygamy as a necessary consequence. A young brother inherits the widow of his elder brother, be he married or not. If polygamy began in this second way, its increase in later times is not to be wondered at. It answers admirably to the Bantu ideal of life. As we saw, a man who has a harem, tshengwe (page 126), is a man who has succeeded in his career! This is the regular method of becoming a rich man, an ideal which is by no means confined to the black race! On the other hand sensuality develops very quickly in the polygamic family and its very development reacts on the custom and tends to foster it.

595 I do not think the origin of polygamy can be traced with 764 certitude. However, there are amongst the Thongas some striking customs, giving to the "first" or "great wife" a special position, which seem to confirm the hypothesis of a primitive monogamy. The first of these is the ritual incision made by the first wife in the inguinal region after the death of the husband; it is not performed by the other widows (p. 200). In the same way the widower carries out this rite only after the death of the first wife and not when "little wives" die. The second is to be found in the rites of the foundation of the village; as we shall see in the next chapter, the first wife has a special part to play in these significant ceremonies. When I asked Magingi, an old Rikatla heathen, why such a difference was made between the first wife and her co-wives, he told me: "The first is the true wife and the others are but thieves. That is why it is said at the death of the first wife: the house of the husband has been crushed (a tjhobekelwi hi yindlu ya kwe). When another dies, it is only said: he has lost a wife (a felwi hi nsati)"...

595 The species of sacredness which surrounds the first wife appears 643 even more plainly in the case of the marriages of chiefs. The principal wife of the chief is in one sense not the actual first wife, but the woman who has been bought with the money collected by his subjects and whose son will be the heir to the chieftainship (See Part III). Generally the "wife of the country" is not the first

231 men having relations with women during menstruation (I. p. 187).
562 Should a drop of it fall in the cattle kraal, this would endanger the
841 health of the whole herd. Women are even prohibited from
784 passing through a herd of oxen ; they must go round it, because
otherwise the death of the calves would ensue. Amongst the
Ba-Ngoni this taboo is so strong that a woman guilty of having
transgressed against it was put to death (1).

231 The object of oxen-breeding is not milk but the acquisition
262 of *wealth* ; oxen mean wealth to the Native, a means of purchasing
556 girls and of thus increasing his family. Oxen are also bred for
food, the meat being highly appreciated and divided amongst all
the members of the family according to the strict rules previously
explained (I. p. 329). The slaughtering is done by piercing the
heart with an assagai, a painful and sometimes very protracted
operation. This occurs at marriage feasts, at other family and
national gatherings, at the sacrifice for rain (Part VI), and on special
occasions, once a year for instance, when a headman wishes to
feast his people. All, even neighbours who are not relatives and
travellers, are welcome to the feast. Natives have wonderful
olfactory powers. They seem to smell out the *lisuna*, viz., the
peculiar odour of the meat, a mile off, and when an ox has been
killed you see them emerging from the bush on all sides!

234 As regards *milk*, it certainly plays a part in the food of villages
which are fortunate enough to possess a well-filled oxen kraal.
The *milking* of the cows presents difficulties unknown in Europe!
African cows have not yet learned to submit tamely to this oper-
ation! The calf must always be allowed to suck a few mouthfuls,
then a boy pulls it away from the teat and the cow consents to be
milked. Should a cow be too wild, they pass a string through its

241 (1) We meet here with an interesting instance of a superstition having no scientific
462 basis whatever, which is nevertheless productive of good results. Women must keep
apart from oxen. Since the plough was introduced amongst South African Natives,
they have been quick to notice that it is a very useful instrument, and have adopted
it in many places. The plough has to be drawn by oxen and men alone are allowed
to drive them. Thus women are relieved of the heavy work of tilling the fields which
had been allotted to them by immemorial custom. It is probable that further know-
ledge will free the Natives from their old fear and from the taboo which resulted from
it ; yet the idea that everything connected with oxen belongs to the domain of man will
remain and thus real social progress will have been obtained through an absurd super-
stition !